

Concept of Political Mediation in International Conflict Management

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ABSTRACT

Conflicts are an integral part of any society, and negotiations are regarded as the most effective tool of conflict management or conflict resolution. In situations, when it is difficult for the parties to resolve the conflict by themselves due to several factors, a third party is involved in a negotiation process. Political mediation has been an effective way in resolving disputes in international relations.

In this article, the author seeks to analyze conflict management, nature of political mediation and provide important insights of political mediation, its types, strategies, role of mediators in international conflict management and mediation bias in case of 1979 Iranian hostage crisis.

KEYWORDS: *international conflict, negotiations, political mediation, strategy, conflict management, state, international organization, non-governmental organization*

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INTRODUCTION

It is well-known that conflicts exist as long as humankind exists. Conflicts and wars occurred between tribes, cities, empires, states. Conflict studies teach us, that war is the culmination of any conflict. Many sociologists claim that conflicts serve as a driver of development of a society, though they pose a threat, instability and lead to a war in most cases. However, "conflict is without doubt one of the most pervasive and costliest of all social processes. It represents the systematic and organized employment of force and violence. Conflict management is an attempt to do something about reducing, limiting or eliminating the level, scope and intensity of violence in conflict, and building a structure where the need to resort to violence in future conflicts is controlled" [1]. Solution of conflicts depends on their nature, object, level and the desire of the antagonists to come to an agreement. Negotiations are considered to be the most effective way in solving conflicts of internal as well as international level. However, in many cases two-sided negotiations are not of great help because of culture, motives and desires of the sides. In cases, when conflicts are long-lasting, the disputants are not willing to come to the negotiation table and this poses a real threat to regional or international peace, or when there is a deadlock, the sides decide to seek for a mutually acceptable outsider's help or an outsider himself offers his assistance. In this situation special type of negotiations, where the third party is involved, can be used. As famous cases of mediation used in international relations we can give examples of Camp David Accords in 1978 between Israel and Egypt with the US as a mediator

and Tashkent Agreement in 1966 between India and Pakistan with the former Soviet Union acting as a mediator.

Political mediation, which is also known as assisted negotiation, "is a voluntary form of peaceful conflict management in international relations, which involves an outsider, who assists the disputants, with their consent, in preventing, managing, or resolving a conflict. It is a widely used conflict resolution tool" [2]. It is said that "mediation has been used everywhere and has existed for millennia" [3], and it is not the same with "good offices", conciliation or arbitration in international relations. Mediator's role is to assist the opponents to come to a mutual understanding and to settle a peace agreement. The third party must be impartial and want a peaceful settlement of the conflict, but the solution has to match the wills and desires of both sides.

In "good offices" the role of a third party is usually limited. Mostly, their involvement is important only in pre-negotiation stage. Conciliation means examining the conflict by independent commission, but its recommendation for a settlement of the conflict is non-binding. Arbitration is almost the same with conciliation, although the recommendation here is binding, unlike conciliation.

The presence of political mediation in international conflicts, and also in civil wars, is extensive, although only occasionally does it attract great attention: "some form of official mediation alone was enjoyed by 255 of the 310 conflicts between 1945 and 1974. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, it seems even more difficult to find conflicts in which intermediaries – unofficial, as well as official – are not

participating in one way or another" [4]. So, nowadays mediation has become one of the most productive methods of preventive diplomacy. Many small states, like Norway and Qatar, offer their assistance as a mediator in many regional or international conflicts. Success of a mediator in resolving an international dispute not only brings peace, but also increases prestige of a state or organization.

In this article we try to delve into the nature of political mediation and analyze the types of mediators and mediation strategies.

METHODS AND LITERATURE

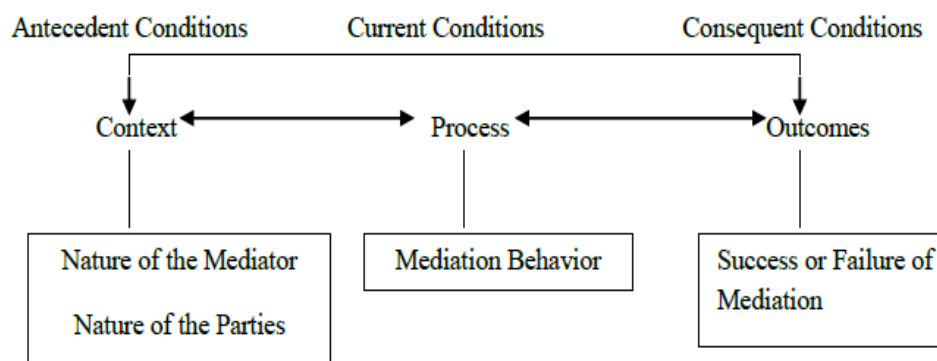
As mediation has been existing for a long time, one can come across various descriptions of it. For Mitchell, mediation means achieving some compromise settlement of issues at stake between antagonists, Moore emphasizes the nature of mediation as an extension and elaboration of the negotiation process. Through the intervention of an "acceptable, impartial and neutral" third party, holding no "authoritative" power, mediation facilitates conflicting parties so that they can reach a mutually acceptable settlement [5]. Bercovitch gives the following definition to international dispute mediation: "process of conflict management, related to but distinct from the parties' own efforts, whereby the disputing

parties or their representatives seek the assistance, or accept an offer of help from an individual, group, state or organization to change, affect or influence their perceptions or behavior, without resorting to physical force, or invoking the authority of the law" [6]. From the above-mentioned definitions it is obvious that mediation:

1. means a third party involved in resolving a conflict;
2. a third party has to be mutually acceptable by the conflicting sides;
3. is a voluntary process and the solution is legally non-binding.

International political mediation can be used in intrastate and interstate conflicts. In this paper we will focus mostly on interstate conflicts. In international mediation there are always a mediator or mediators (when several states perform as mediators), disputants, a dispute and an outcome, which can be a success or a failure. In order to understand the mediation process, we should better learn the mediator, conflicting sides and their relationship. In the following diagram a model of a mediation process is shown [7]:

Figure 1. A Contingency Model of Mediation*



*Bercovitch and Houston (1996).

So, who can act as a mediator in international conflict management? It should be emphasized that every mediator brings their own set of skills, experience, background and personality to a process, which have a profound impact on the mediation. Mediator's behavior, attitude to a process and a cultural background plays an important role in mediation. Individuals, states, regional or international organizations and non-governmental organizations can perform as mediators. Sometimes there can be a combined type of mediation.

Individual mediators are usually people with a high reputation or great moral authority. They can be former heads of state, traditional or religious leaders. They are often mandated by a state or an organization. A well-known example of such a mediator is former UN secretary-general Kofi Annan, who chaired the Panel of Eminent African Personalities that mediated the 2007-2008 Kenyan election crisis, supported by the African Union's Panel of the Wise [8].

State mediators are the most common type as they are involved in almost half of all mediation processes [9]. They can involve heads of states, ministers, diplomats or mediation experts. We can watch great powers (the USA or Russia) as well as middle (Turkey) and small states (Switzerland or Norway) acting as mediators in international conflicts. Motivation of states to mediate in any international conflict depends on different factors. It can be relations with one of the parties until the conflict began, suffer from negative effects or consequences of the ongoing conflict, or a strategy to increase a state's international prestige. In the following table the involvement of a state in a mediation process explained in detail [10]:

	Characteristics	Strengths	Challenges
1	States particularly become involved in their close neighbourhood, as they have an interest in a stable environment or wish to pursue other geopolitical ambitions.	States may have a particular affinity to specific conflict actors for historical, geopolitical or cultural reasons.	States have their own interests and are often partial.

2	Smaller states are more often perceived as being impartial, even though they also pursue normative and strategic interests.	State representatives are well connected and have access to high-ranking diplomatic circles.	It is difficult for states to make contact with certain non-state actors.
3	Larger states often have greater scope for exerting their influence.	States often have great potential to bring together relevant actors (convening power).	States may be restricted in their mediation activities owing to the principles underlying the international order (e.g. territorial integrity) and their membership of international organisations.
4		States are able to facilitate travel formalities for conflict actors.	
5		Some states possess considerable financial resources and important expertise.	

Regional or international organizations include such actors like the UN, the EU, the African Union, the OSCE, the NATO etc. They intervene for different purposes, for example, to promote peace and stabilize the region of the ongoing conflict. International organizations have, unlike other mediators, administrative resources.

Non-governmental organizations also can act as mediators. However, they have limited resources and sometimes it is difficult for them to engage with high level state representatives. Mostly, they play an important role in pre-negotiations process and pave the way for official mediation.

It is not always possible to manage an international conflict when only one mediator is involved in the process. Therefore, several mediators can perform together in one case in order to ease the tension of the conflict.

The outcome of an international mediation depends on several factors. In this case the mediation strategy is of great importance. The roles that mediators accept and the goals they pursue are manifold, because the disputes and the conflicts, in which they involve, vary in intensity, escalation, dynamics, content and context, actors, circumstances and other details. For example, Kressel classifies the following strategies: directive (promoting specific outcomes), non-directive (producing a favorable climate for mediation), and reflexive (discovering issues, facilitating better understanding)[11]. Along the same lines, Zartman and Touval have described the three basic mediation strategies: "communication", "formulation" and "manipulation"[12]. According to them, in the early stages mediators carry messages to the parties and help them to understand their meaning. Then they perform as formulators by providing a formula for the negotiations, which means assistance for understanding the core of the common problem and finding solution that matches the interests of both sides. In the end, mediators use their leverage to bring the antagonists to come to an agreement.

Cohen claims that cultural background is of utmost importance in mediation process, as mediator is someone who must bridge the gap between the parties from different cultures [13]. Our focus is not the cultural context of mediation, however, it is another issue for a detailed research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In order to learn the mediation process in international conflict and understand the outcome of a particular case one must scrutinize the nature of a mediator and his motives,

conflicting parties, the dispute and, of course, mediation strategies. As mentioned above, a mediator must be objective and impartial. Some scholars argue on the issue that bias has a positive impact on the mediation outcome, while others claim that neutral mediators contribute more to the process. Nevertheless, in some cases mediation bias helps to resolve the dispute. In our opinion, it depends on the nature of the conflict and parties. In the following example we try to analyze a mediation bias through the US – Iran hostage crisis in 1979.

After the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, the US embassy personnel were taken hostages. The US rescue operation failed and they were released after 444 days. In that case Algeria performed as a mediator between the US and Iran. Algeria was in a good relationship with Iran, had solidarity and shared Islamic traditions. Nevertheless, Algeria was accepted by the US as a mediator. How could that happen?

In contemporary literature impartiality is generally subordinated to the issue of leverage the mediator has towards the disputing sides. As Zartman and Touval put it, "the US accepted Algerian mediation not because of its impartiality, but because it had an open access with the inner circle of Khomeini's regime and thus able to promise help in releasing the hostages"[14]. In this sense mediator bias had a positive influence to the mediation process.

On the other hand, states acting as a mediator in the negotiations, pursue different goals. In case of Iranian hostage crisis, Algeria gained international recognition as a mediator, who could contribute to the resolution of the conflict. For many states mediation is a strategy of foreign policy. It does not make a sense if they have benefits from the conflict management (stability, peace etc.), they offer mediator services according to the mediation-as-foreign-policy approach. Switzerland and Norway are good examples of this strategy. Nowadays Turkey [15] and Kazakhstan [16] are also offering mediation services when regional or international conflicts occur. Especially, small states or middle powers pursue this goal because engaging in mediation activity enables them to create an extra political power space not otherwise available [17]. Some scholars assess Uzbekistan's efforts to create "6+2" and "6+3" groups as well as Doha meeting in 2019 as important attempts towards bringing peace to the region. However, they claim that Tashkent has effectively positioned itself as a reliable mediator in the Afghan peace process and intensified its efforts to talk to and bring all the participants of the conflict to the negotiation table [18].

CONCLUSION

Conflicts and disputes are integral part of world politics. Clash of interests of different groups, states or other actors of international relations causes different type of conflicts. Duration of conflicts differs from each other, some may last for a short period of time, others last longer and the third ones could end with a deadlock. The most effective way of prevention of the dispute or easing the tension between the parties is negotiating. Sometimes due to several factors it is impossible for the antagonists to come to the negotiation table by themselves. In this case mediator's assistance is of great "help" to them. Mediator serves as a bridge between the disputants and helps them to find the most acceptable for both sides solution to a problem. Mediation, or involvement of a third party in a negotiation process, has been an effective tool of conflict management for a long time.

Different actors of international relations may act as a mediator and sometimes there is a mixed type of mediation. All of them have their own motives, interests and goals in getting involved in the process. Mediators choose from a variety of mediation strategies according to the situation and to their skills. The outcome of a mediation depends on the nature of the conflict and disputants, the background as well as mediation skills and experience of the mediator and, of course, on the mediation strategy.

Although in the history there have been successes as well as failures in political mediation, it remains as an efficient method and art of international conflict management.

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